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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SHENYANG 000048

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/CM, EAP/K, PRM, INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: TEN YEARS AFTER KOREAN UNIFICATION  
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KN](#) [KS](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: MORE INTERNAL PRC RESEARCH ON NK BORDER-CROSSERS:  
POLICY AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES

REF: A. (A) SHENYANG 12  
[1](#)B. (B) 07 SHENYANG 229  
[1](#)C. (C) 07 SHENYANG 196  
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[1](#)F. (F) 07 SHENYANG 78

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL STEPHEN B. WICKMAN.  
REASONS: 1.4(b)/(d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Northeast China is home to 10,000-20,000 North Koreans, according to the internal research of another one of the few Chinese specialists studying North Korean border-crosser issues for the PRC Government. PRC policy toward North Korean border-crossers shifted in 2002 in part because of growing evidence of the involvement of some crossers in criminal activity, said the specialist, who noted that Chinese border officials remain frustrated by the laxity of the DPRK's border control. A small cohort of scholars has explored certain policy alternatives to arresting and repatriating North Koreans. A major push for policy change, however, remains unlikely, not only because of political considerations, but also because of the professional reluctance of scholars to advocate radical policy alternatives that are likely to be perceived negatively by superiors. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Poloff met privately February 21 with WU Jianhua (STRICTLY PROTECT), a North Korea expert at the Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences (LASS) and part of a small, informal cohort of northeastern Chinese scholars researching North Korean border-crosser issues on behalf of the PRC government. This is the fourth in an irregular series of reports exploring internal PRC thinking on North Korean border-crosser issues and the researchers sanctioned by the Chinese government to study them (see refs A-C for previous).

#### BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

[1](#)3. (C) A government scholar also active on PRC-DPRK border security and cross-border trade issues, Wu conducts classified, internal ("neibu") research on North Korean border-crossers. Much of his research is field/survey-based, like that of the Jilin Academy of Social Sciences' ZHOU Weiping (refs C, A) and LASS' LU Chao (refs B, D), two other northeastern Chinese government specialists with whom

Wu has collaborated in the past. In the field, Wu--who studied in Pyongyang in the late 1980s, again in the early 2000s and returns each year--has interviewed North Korean border-crossers living in Dandong, Yanbian and other parts of northeast China's borderlands. He has also been permitted to interview PRC border authorities and detained North Korean border-crossers in situ at Dandong's detention center for apprehended North Koreans.

#### ESTIMATES OF NORTH KOREAN BORDER-CROSSERS IN CHINA

14. (C) Wu's estimates of North Korean border-crossers in China are lower than those of other researchers in his cohort. Though well-known methodological problems make reliable statistics difficult, Wu believes northeast China is home to roughly 10,000-20,000 North Korean border-crossers, primarily situated in Jilin and Liaoning provinces and, to a lesser extent, in Heilongjiang Province. (Ref C and the Jilin Academy of Social Sciences' Zhou Weiping puts the number closer to 50,000, largely concentrated in Jilin Province's Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture.)

15. (C) Queried on his interviews of border-crossers detained in Dandong, Wu--echoing comments made by another scholar (ref C)--reported that PRC border police continue to (re)apprehend North Koreans that they have arrested and repatriated to the DPRK. In interviews, certain detainees said they did not fear repatriation and, in some cases, rather defiantly declared that they would again return to China, according to Wu. The ability of North Koreans like these to make multiple forays into China after repatriation underscores, in part, the corruption of North Korean

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soldiers and other security personnel on the DPRK side of the border, Wu said. It also suggests, in select cases, ties of some border-crossers to resilient criminal networks in North Korea, Wu asserted without offering further elaboration. He repeatedly emphasized local Chinese border officials' frustration at the laxity of the PRC-DPRK border, putting the bulk of the blame squarely on the DPRK. (NOTE: Corruption on the Chinese side of the border remains a problem on this front as well; see, for instance, refs E-1F. END NOTE.)

#### PRC POLICY EVOLVES: 2002 AS TURNING POINT

16. (C) Turning to PRC policy toward North Korean border-crossers, Wu explained that until 2002, Beijing and local northeastern Chinese government officials benignly neglected North Koreans "living peacefully" in northeast China. But in 2002, PRC policy toward North Korean border-crossers officially shifted, requiring the arrest and repatriation of "illegal migrants" to the DPRK. The well-known, high-profile incursions into diplomatic facilities in 2002 was only one catalyst, according to Wu. The other catalyst was the gradual accretion in China of evidence indicating the involvement of some North Korean border-crossers in criminal activities that Chinese officials adjudged to undermine border stability, Wu said.

17. (C) In the years following, PRC policy has practically evolved to involve deterrence, principally by delaying exit permission to North Koreans who have successfully accessed diplomatic compounds in China. While the PRC "allows" some to find refuge at foreign embassies or consulates within China, Beijing aims to "punish" (and hence deter) South Korea and other countries by imposing long delays for exit permission, Wu said.

#### WHITHER PRC POLICY ALTERNATIVES ON NK BORDER-CROSSERS?

18. (C) Asked about internal debates among government scholars on possible policy alternatives to repatriating North Korean border-crossers, Wu sounded somewhat

conflicted. On the one hand, he asserted that North Korean border-crossers today are not analogous to the 1970s-era Vietnamese, whom the PRC regarded as bona fide refugees and, consequently, accorded commensurate treatment. On the other hand, even despite the fear of a "flood" of North Korean refugees into China, Wu acknowledges that the PRC's repatriation policy "undermines" China's "humanitarian image in the world." Wu reported that he and a small group of other scholars have investigated some policy alternatives. One proposal, for instance, would be to quietly establish certain "paths" (shuidao) to normalization for North Koreans who have lived in China for many years without incident. (NOTE: Wu, who appeared quite nervous discussing the topic in general, would not elaborate further. Ref C points to some specific paths to normalization being explored by other scholars. END NOTE.)

19. (C) However, a radical shift in policy remains unlikely, and not just because of political calculations, Wu said. In the "Chinese system," Wu averred, scholars cannot professionally sustain advocating granting North Koreans refugee status as a possible policy alternative. Such a move, he claimed, would be received as a condemnation of current policy and its makers. He concluded that the "Chinese system," in this respect, is beset structurally by a reluctance of inferiors, like himself, to "fan shang," or go against one's superiors.

WICKMAN